

Newsline

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www.mdt.state.mt.us

Montana's Historical Highway Marker's

BY
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ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES



Beginning in 1931, Montana's highways were a tourist's dream. The Montana Highway Department underwent a fundamental change that year with the first of the Great Depression era highway construction relief programs. Over the next decade, Montana's highways evolved from among the poorest in the na-

tion to one of the country's most modern transportation systems. By necessity, the infrequently paved, relatively narrow two-lane roads made the best of the state's geography, truly putting the driver in tune with Montana's natural scenic beauty. To accommodate the tourists, the Highway Department initiated a series of projects designed to facilitate them. Of all those projects, the highway historical marker program was the most recognized and praised by the public. It is also the last surviving remnant of Montana's early tourist industry remaining on the state's highways. The markers were the invention of a Highway Department engineer – Bob Fletcher.



Robert Fletcher
MHS, Photograph Archives

In 1931, the Highway Department realized tourism was a major industry in the depression-ravaged state. That year the Highway Commission placed Fletcher in charge of the department's promotional bureau. Under his guidance, it created a state port-of-entry program and established a series of roadside parks throughout Montana. Log port-of-entry stations were constructed at the Montana borders on the primary highways. They were manned by "well-mannered" attendants dressed in what Fletcher considered authentic western clothes. They provided thousands of tourists with highway maps, promotional brochures and general information designed to make their stay in Montana as pleasant as possible.

In 1938, Fletcher was able to convince the highway commissioners to construct roadside museums in strategic locations throughout Montana. The museums included archaeological artifacts (mostly garnered from the Highway Department owned Pictograph Cave site outside Billings), dioramas and other exhibits. The Laurel Museum

(which still exists) was operated by Crow tribal member Max Big Man and included a tipi on the museum's grounds. Fletcher also persuaded the department to incorporate turn-outs into its highway designs for picnic areas; sites which included the historical markers.

Perhaps Fletcher's most lasting contribution to the program was the roadside highway historical markers. Fletcher's idea of installing informative markers next to Montana's highways began in the 1920s after he became bored reading South Dakota's historical markers. The lack of federal funding and little interest on the part of the state highway commissioners killed the project before it got off the ground.

The importance of tourism to the state's economy during the 1930s did not go unrecognized by the Highway Department. This, coupled with the presence of two sympathetic highway commissioners was enough for the department to initiate the highway marker program in May, 1935. The department installed 28 markers during that summer's construction season. The Highway Department gave Fletcher considerable autonomy in the project, allowing him to determine the subject matter and the location of the markers.

The charm of the markers was in the folksy language Fletcher used and their rustic appearance – generally two log uprights with a finished wood or log cross beam from which the sign board was suspended. The uprights were anchored in field-stone or cobblestone bases. Fletcher tapped Asa "Ace" Kindrick to come up with a design for the markers. At first he hand lettered the texts onto 5' x 8' sheets of plywood. The plywood, however, proved unable to withstand Montana's sometimes harsh weather conditions and had to be replaced within just a few years. Fletcher and Kindrick then experimented with a



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variety of different woods for the marker boards before settling on stained redwood by 1940. Eventually, Kindrick began to rout the text into the boards and then stained them a Navajo red color — a system that has essentially remained the same to this day.

To complement the markers, Fletcher enlisted the talents of the department's graphic illustrator, Irvin "Shorty" Shope. Shope designed silhouettes of Native Americans, prospectors, cowboys, wagon trains, cavalrymen and dinosaurs that were routed onto the crossbeams of the markers supports. Shorty's designs not only accentuated the markers, but also made each one a work of art, a fact that was not lost on the hundreds of people who stopped to read them each year. Unfortunately, few markers with Shope's



"Shorty" Shope

handiwork still exist. When the first markers were installed in 1935, the commissioners and Fletcher could hardly expect the amount of good publicity it generated for the department. Their homespun charm, appearance and "authentic cowboy lingo" more than made up for sometimes weak research and what would now be considered racist language. They were praised in national magazines as excellent examples of "regional literature." They even earned the approval of Bernard DeVoto, historian and author of the seminal study of the fur trade and noted curmudgeon, *"Montana does its roads history exhaustively and well. It marks all the important sites - neatly, in excellent taste . . . And its markers use good prose, lightly written, of a humor and realism that exclude the ancestor-worship of the organized descendants of The Pioneers."*

The markers also drew praise from famous World War II journalist Ernie Pyle who wrote; *"I wish every state historical society in America would send a delegation to Montana. And if they then practice what they learned I'll bet that twenty years from now we Americans would know a lot more about American history. Montana makes its history a thing of joy, instead of a stodgy sermon."*

In his 1937 promotional booklet *Headin' for the Hills*, Fletcher boastfully described his markers as *" . . . the best idea I've seen in any state. The story they tell is pepped up a little for people who are human and don't take themselves . . . too seriously."* By 1942, the highway department had installed 104 historical markers along Montana's highways.

In February, 1941, Bob Fletcher resigned from the highway department to work for the Mon-

tana Power Company. However, he continued to write the texts for new historical markers until at least 1952. In 1948, the Commission inaugurated a second highway marker program to denote points of geologic interest in Montana. Unfortunately, this program lasted for only a few years and none of the markers survived.

Thirteen years after his death in 1972, many of Fletcher's beloved historical markers were upgraded as part of a legislative mandate. By the early 1980s, many of them were severely weathered, vandalized and in need of replacement. In more than a few cases, the colorful language Fletcher used to describe the state's Native American inhabitants and others was no longer socially acceptable. In 1985, the legislature allocated money to refurbish the old markers and rewrite those that contained offensive language without changing the overall flavor of the inscriptions. Many of the 115 Fletcher-written markers were revised to reflect late 20th century sensibilities. Even the old stone bases are now being replaced since they do not meet current crash standards.

Since 1985, 56 historical markers have been added to the state's highway system. Today, the contents of the markers remain basically the same, although the language has changed. New markers have been erected describing some of the smaller towns on the state's byways, events and people that Fletcher probably did not even consider in the 1930s. The Montana highway historical markers have become part of the state's transportation landscape, allowing the motorist an opportunity to enjoy the history of the state along with an appreciation of Montana's scenic beauty.

Recently the Montana Historical Society updated and reprinted *Montana's Historic Highway Markers*, a project partially funded by MDT. The book includes the text of the new highway markers along with updated maps that make locating the signs much easier for those who may not wish to stop and read each individual marker. The \$10.95 book is available at your local bookstore or from the Montana Historical Society at (406) 444-2890 or visit www.his.state.mt.us.

**Empire
Celebrates
of**

**Builder
70
Years
Service**



This year marks the 70th year of operation for the Empire Builder, an important part of Montana's passenger transportation system. The twice-daily passenger rail service provides residents along the Hi-Line with safe and reliable service to major cities, delivers time-sensitive freight to Montana businesses, and plays a significant role in bringing out-of-state visitors to communities near Glacier National Park.

The Empire Builder began operation on June 11, 1929 on the Great Northern Railway. The service was named after the railroad's founder James Hill, who played a major role in opening the northern plain states to settlement. Today, Amtrak operates the "Builder" over Burlington Northern Santa Fe lines between Chicago and Seattle with stops at 12 Montana stations from Wolf Point to Libby.

The Empire Builder has experienced ups and downs over the years including significant reductions in service between 1995 and 1997, and frequent threats to eliminate the service entirely. However, recent and planned service improvements promise a bright future for one of Montana's transportation treasures. MDT is working with Amtrak and businesses and communities to increase the Empire Builder's viability and ensure continued service to Montana for many years to come.

Information about Amtrak schedules and fares is available from local travel agents or by calling 1-800-USA-RAIL or visiting www.amtrak.com.

Helena Dial-a-Ride Loses Manager



Montana's transit family and the Helena community lost a long time friend and transit advocate when Orval Meyer passed away on July 16 from injuries suffered in a natural explosion at Helena Dial-a-Ride.

As Operations Manager for Dial-a-Ride, Orval provided caring and reliable service for 15 years to the many riders who depended on Dial-a-Ride for transportation. Prior to joining Dial-a-Ride, Orval worked at Special Transportation in Billings. In both positions, he was known for his personal touch, gentlemanly manner, and dedication to the many employees, peers, and clients who considered him a friend.

The Montana Transit Association and MDT are developing an annual award in Orval Meyers' honor for transit agencies or individuals that best represent his commitment and service to his community.

Opening the Lines of Communication!

It's been about eighteen months since the department's *Public Involvement Handbook* was finalized, approved and distributed to MDT's divisions and districts for implementation. This basic process for designing and conducting public involvement from the early stages is beginning to have an impact.

We are seeing and hearing great results!

The handbook emphasizes the need for the districts to take the lead in the public involvement arena. District and area office employees have the most direct line of communication and understanding of issues concerning their constituents.

District Administrators and their staffs are taking a very active role in meeting with individuals and groups in formal and informal settings. They are equipped to conduct and record some of the more formal meetings with indirect support from the Planning Outreach and Support Unit of the Planning Division.

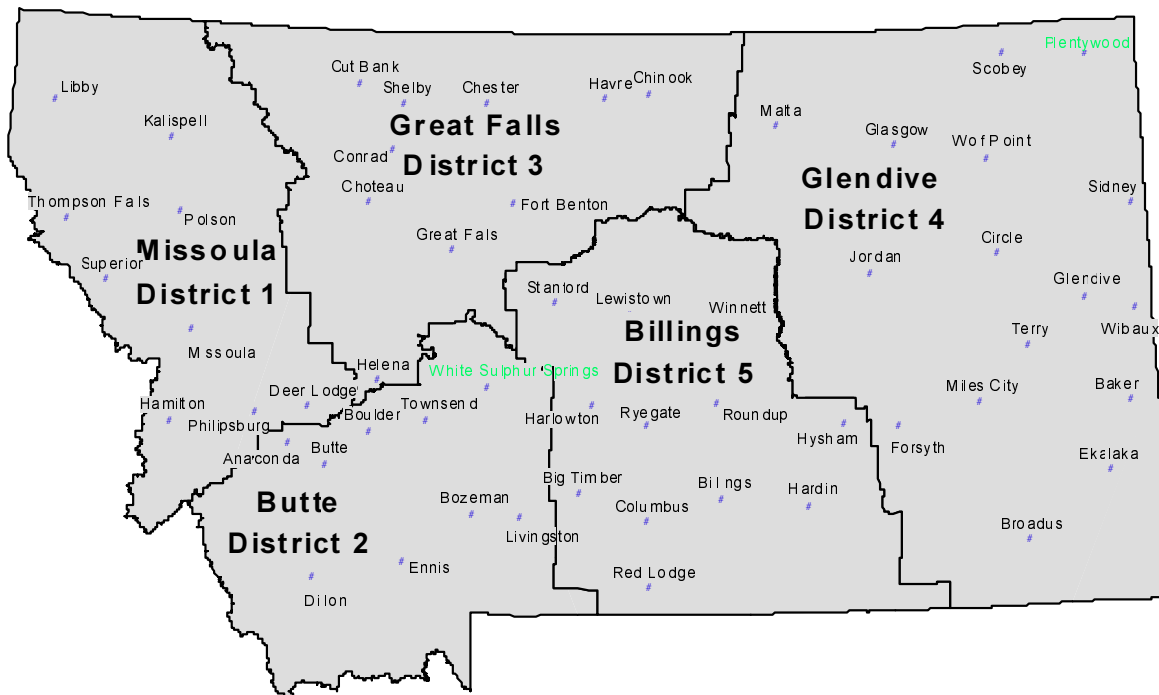
The projects along US Highway 93 in District One are evidence of improving communications between the department and a variety of interested groups and individuals despite the pace of completion.

Further evidence of open communication is the on-going discussions between District 3 officials, Hill County officials and concerned citizens regarding a project south of Havre. This example is mirrored across the state in all five districts.

The Planning Outreach and Support Unit staff is available, willing and eager to take a more active role when requested. The initial success of the districts' work indicates the concepts in the handbook are working.

If you're interested in a transportation project in your area contact your MDT District Administrator.

<u>District</u>	<u>Headquarters</u>	<u>Administrator</u>	<u>Local Phone</u>	<u>Toll-free Phone</u>	<u>E-Mail Address</u>
1	Missoula	Jim Weaver	(406) 523-5800	(888) 231-5819	jaweaver@state.mt.us
2	Butte	Jason Giard	(406) 494-9600	(800) 261-6909	jgiard@state.mt.us
3	Great Falls	Michael Johnson	(406) 454-5880	(888) 730-0898	mijohnson@state.mt.us
4	Glendive	Bill McChesney	(406) 377-5296	(888) 589-5296	bmcchesney@state.mt.us
5	Billings	Bruce Barrett	(406) 252-4138	(888) 863-8465	bbarrett@state.mt.us



Secondary Program Changes

As mentioned in the April 1999 NEWSLINE, the 56th Legislature made major changes to Montana's Secondary Highway Program. In putting this complex piece of legislation together, MDT and the MACo Transportation Committee framed a program approach which changed the long standing Secondary Program in two major areas:

1. MDT will assume *paved* secondary route maintenance by January of 2001, and
2. The secondary capital improvement program will be developed and prioritized jointly by the Counties and each Financial District, rather than at the County level.

Eighteen months ago when Secondary Bill (S.333) was formulated, the Counties and MDT began to work in close cooperation and are now moving through the implementation process.

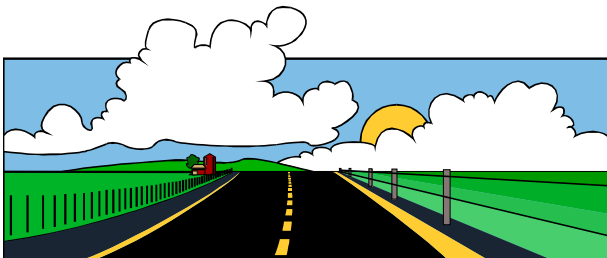
During July and August, County and MDT officials met in each of Montana's five Financial Districts. In some Districts, meetings have already been held to prioritize a proposed project list for the increased funding made available through TEA-21.

While the Counties in each District are at different points in the implementation process, significant progress is being made in each of Montana's five Financial Districts with some positive surprises! For example, MDT staff has heard from several County Commissioners regarding their support for secondary projects in neighboring Counties. This kind of "regional" thinking will be broadly needed for the long-term success of the new secondary program.

For right now, a lot of hard work remains before Secondary Program implementation targets are complete. In short, by later in the fall:

- 1) New secondary projects will have been prioritized and approved into the construction program, and
- 2) Agreements will be in place to begin maintenance July 1, 2000 with the transition to be complete by the January 2001 deadline.

If you have any questions regarding Secondary project selection contact Gary Larson, Secondary Roads Engineer, at (406) 444-6110 or glarson@state.mt.us. If you have any questions about the phasing in of state maintenance of the Secondaries contact John Blacker, Maintenance Administrator at (406) 444-6158 or jblacker@state.mt.us.



Fast Facts

Secondary Program Changes

- Under the current Federal-aid Highway Program (TEA-21), MDT is increasing available funds for Secondary highways from \$15.1 million (federal and state) to \$24.0 million annually. At least 65% of these funds will be prioritized for capital improvements with the rest dedicated to preservation.
- Secondary funds will now be distributed to the Financial Districts based on the following factors:
 - 30% Land Area**
This factor recognizes the land access function of the Secondary System including the fact that Secondary highways serve large Federal land holdings.
 - 35% Rural Population**
This factor acts as a proxy for the population served and the relative vehicle usage on the Secondaries in different regions of the state.
 - 30% Rural Road Mileage**
This factor uses only rural major collector mileage that is the functional system from which the Secondaries are designated. Using functional system mileage rather than Secondary mileage will de-couple funding distribution questions from system designation issues.
 - 5% Rural Bridge Square Footage**
This factor recognizes that bridges on the Secondary System are also funded through the Secondary Program allocation. By focusing on the square footage rather than condition, there is no reward for doing a poor job of bridge maintenance or penalty for doing a good job.
- MDT will phase in maintaining the paved Secondary Highways starting in July 2000.
- The maintenance responsibilities will be completely assumed by January 2001.
- Negotiations for the transition in maintenance responsibility include a conflict resolution process.
- It's estimated over 2,787 miles of Secondary Highways will shift to state maintenance responsibility. This is about 60% of the Secondary System. The other roadways are either gravel or not sufficiently paved to qualify.
- MDT will accomplish these new responsibilities with resources from existing state fuel taxes as approved by the legislature.
- MDT maintenance of paved Secondaries will include:
 - winter maintenance
 - pavement maintenance
 - stripping and signing
 - maintenance of safety devices, and
 - maintenance of drainage and roadside activities.

Where do you suggest.....?

Visitors from other states and countries often ask MDT staff to recommend Montana highways that have special scenic or historic qualities. Since Montana is blessed with many of these highways, and these qualities are often in the eye of the beholder, MDT staff has developed a comprehensive list of publications and other resources to recommend to these visitors. The publications are available at most Montana bookstores and libraries or can be purchased directly from the publishers.



BOOKS

Montana's Historical Highway Markers,

By Glenda Clay Bradshaw (Montana Historical Society Press)

Frommer's America's Best-Loved Driving Tours,

by Automobile Association (Frommer)

Scenic Driving Yellowstone, by Susan Springer Butler
(Falcon Publishing)

Back Country Byways, by Stewart Green (Falcon Publishing)

Scenic Driving the Beartooth Highway, by H. L. James
(Falcon Publishing)

National Forest Scenic Byways: Your Complete Guide to America's Most Scenic Drives, by Beverly Magley (Falcon Publishing)

National Forest Scenic Byways II: Your Complete Guide to America's Most Scenic Drives, by Beverly Magley (Falcon Publishing)

National Forest Scenic Byways: Rocky Mountains,
by Beverly Magley (Falcon Publishing)

National Geographic's Driving Guides to America: The Rockies-Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and Colorado, by Thomas Schmidt and Michael Lewis (National Geographic Society)

Scenic Driving Montana, by S. A. Snyder (Falcon Publishing)

Lewis and Clark Trail Books

Along the Trail with Lewis and Clark, by Barbara Fifer and Vicky Soderberg (American World Geographic Publishing)

Traveling the Lewis and Clark Trail, by Julie Fanselow
(Falcon Publishing)



WEB SITES

www.travel.state.mt.us

State web site that lists scenic drives

www.trailofthegreatbear.com

Trail of the Great Bear

www.byways.org

National Scenic BywaysOnline; each state's scenic drives (even if not state or federally designated)

www.gorp.com

Great Outdoors Recreation Page

www.np.gov/lecl

Lewis and Clark Trail

www.fs.fed

U.S. Forest Service



VIDEOS

"Beartooth Highway", USDA Forest Service Northern Region-Public Affairs Office, Gene Colling

"Kings Hill Scenic Byway", USDA Forest Service Northern Region Public Affairs Office, Gene Colling

WHITETAIL LINE RAIL REHABILITATION PROJECT APPROVED

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) recently approved a Local Rail Freight Assistance (LRFA) project grant of \$689,738 for a project on the Whitetail Line in northeast Montana. The funds will be used for tie installation, anchoring, crossing improvements, installation of ballast and track surfacing on a 21.1 mile (33.9 km) segment of track between Dooley and Outlook in Sheridan and Daniels Counties.

The segment of rail line is located between Whitetail and Westby and is part of the Whitetail Line leased to Dakota, Missouri Valley and Western (DMVW) Railroad by the Canadian Pacific (CP) Railway. Virtually all business from the shippers on this line is outbound wheat and barley.

Work on the project will begin in the near future and be completed this fall, depending on weather conditions and the availability of contractors. DMVW will pay for 30% of the total project costs.

For more information, contact Tom Steyaert at (406) 444-7646 or tsteyaert@state.mt.us.



Whitetail Elevator



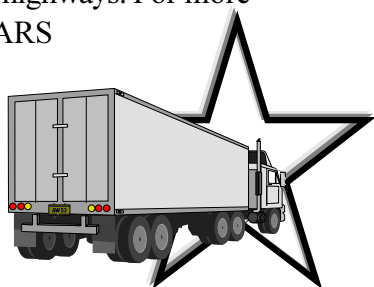
MDT IS SEEING STARS!

STARS, or the *State Truck Activity Reporting System*, is a new program at MDT. It is designed to gather important information about heavy vehicle usage on Montana's highways. Designated as one of MDT's three primary initiatives by Director Marv Dye, STARS will provide information on a scale which, until now, was only wishful thinking.

Adequate and accurate data is critical in properly planning, maintaining, and designing highways, as well as for enforcing vehicular size and weight laws. Collecting this data in the past has been very labor intensive and time consuming. Even with all the past efforts, more data was needed. Enter STARS!

What makes STARS unique is data collection by state-of-the-art equipment that doesn't require human intervention during the data collection phase. Equipment is installed in the road which can, among other things, detect and record vehicle types, speeds, lengths and weights while allowing vehicles to pass at highway speeds. At some locations, data collection can continue 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The data can be retrieved from a remote terminal location hundreds of miles from the site. This equipment will allow MDT to collect data from as many as 90 locations around the state at a fraction of the cost it would take to dispatch staff to the field to do the same work.

The net effect of the STARS program will be more and better information resulting in more cost efficient, longer-lasting, and safer highways. For more information on the STARS program contact Dan Bisom at (406)444-6122 or dbisom@state.mt.us.



DID YOU EVER WONDER WHY

If you are a typical traveler on Montana's highways, you may have tried to compare the accuracy of your car's odometer with the green milepost markers along the highway. No doubt you found distances where two consecutive milepost markers weren't exactly a mile. *You're quite right!* There are **many** cases where the distance between milepost markers are greater or less than a mile.

There are several reasons for this discrepancy, two of which are most common. First, when a route was initially mile-posted, the posts were placed a mile apart wherever possible. However, the end of these one-mile segments frequently fell in the middle of an intersection, a driveway, or some other area that would prohibit the physical installation of a marker at the exact mile location. Therefore, the post location had to be moved before or after the actual one-mile location. A more common reason is that over the years roads require reconstruction and are often shortened by straightening out curves, realigning a road, etc. Only those posts directly affected by the reconstruction project are moved, usually resulting in these particular reference posts being closer together than one mile.

MDT utilizes these markers for a multitude of purposes, but mostly to collect, store, track, analyze, and retrieve information about Montana's highways. Since each marker refers to a specific location, they are more accurately referred to as "reference" posts rather than "mile" posts.

For more information on "reference posts" contact Zia Kazimi at (406)444-6111 or zkazimi@state.mt.us.



America Buckles Up Children

Montana is actively participating in an effort to increase the safety of children when riding in motor vehicles. Nationally a campaign to increase the use of seat belt and air bag protections, called Operation ABC, began Memorial day weekend 1999 and will extend through Thanksgiving weekend. More than 6,000 state and local law enforcement agencies pledged to write tickets for those drivers who have children improperly or not buckled up in their vehicle. This action was supported by 43 of the Nation's Governors, including Governor Racicot. Every state has a law that children under 4 years of age be properly secured in a vehicle. The national campaign pledged "NO excuses, NO exceptions."

According to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and others, car crashes were the leading cause of death for children younger than 15 years of age. More than 2,000 children were killed and some 320,000 injured in traffic crashes in America during 1997. Six out of ten children killed in these crashes were riding unrestrained.

Through national and local public information efforts, drivers were alerted to the stepped up enforcement, and to the need to buckle up children and put them in the back seat where it is safer during a crash. Several sheriff and police departments signed up for the national campaign on their own. MDT's Traffic Safety Bureau issued contracts to six of the larger law enforcement agencies to focus on occupant protection enforcement. The bureau continues to train local peace officers, firemen, medical, and other public and private sector participants in the proper use and fit of child safety seats.

Research shows that when adults buckle up, their children buckle up as well, and continue to use seat belts as adults. When adults don't buckle up, children probably do not learn to use this simple act to protect themselves. Montana's seat belt use varies from lows of 40% in rural areas and small communities to over 80% on the Interstate. The state's overall rate for all roadways is at 73% use. Child safety seat use, however, is estimated at 85% but many of these seats likely are improperly secured or inappropriate for the child size and weight.

Contact Al Goke (444-7301) or agoke@state.mt.us for more information on the national, state and local enforcement programs. For concerns about your own child's safety seat and appropriate fittings, contact Priscilla Sinclair (444-7417) or psinclair@state.mt.us about attending one of the child safety seat clinics conducted around the state.

Revised Guide to Public Transportation in Montana Now Available

MDT's Transit Section recently revised the "Guide to Public Transportation in Montana" brochure.

Contact Janis Winston at (406) 444-4210 or e-mail jwinston@state.mt.us or visit MDT's website at www.mdt.state.mt.us to view or request a copy.



MONTANA ROAD FACTS

- ✕ Rexford has the least number of miles of public road (excluding alleys) of any incorporated city at 1.38 miles. Billings has the most at 449 miles.
- ✕ There are 884 miles of alleys in Montana's 129 cities. Billings has the most with 120 miles. Bear Creek, Fort Peck, Pinesdale and Rexford have no alley miles.
- ✕ There are 203 miles of four-lane highways (not including the Interstate) throughout the state.
- ✕ Trucks comprise about 15% of the total vehicle miles of travel on Montana's higher-level roads.
- ✕ When measuring rural congestion levels, 98% of the Interstate currently operates at the highest (most uncongested) of six possible levels of ranking.
- ✕ MDT gathers traffic data at more than 4000 sites each year.
- ✕ The longest U.S. numbered route in Montana is US 2 at 666 miles long.
- ✕ The *longest* state numbered route is MT 200 between North Dakota and Idaho at 707 miles long. The *shortest* signed state route is MT 68 in Cascade at 1.5 miles long.

Transportation Planning Division Telephone Numbers

Only the most frequently requested numbers are listed here. For an area or person not listed, call **1-800-714-7296** (in Montana only), or **(406) 444-3423**. TTY (406) 444-7696 or 1-800-335-7592

Administrator (Patricia Saindon).....	444-3143
Bike/Pedestrian (Jennifer Dalrymple).....	444-9273
CTEP (Mike Davis).....	444-4383
Mapping (Jim Erickson).....	444-6119
Multimodal Planning (Dick Turner).....	444-7289
Projects (Jeff Ebert).....	444-7639
Public Involvement (Dave Dreher).....	444-6245
Safety Programs-Drug/Alcohol, Occupant Protection (Priscilla Sinclair).....	444-7417
Secondary Roads (Gary Larson).....	444-6110
Road Inventory & Mapping (Zia Kazimi).....	444-6111
Traffic Safety (Albert Goke).....	444-7301
Traffic Data (Dan Bisom).....	444-6122
Transit (Janis Winston).....	444-4210
Urban Planning (Lynn Zanto).....	444-3445
ITS Planning (Ross Tervo).....	444-9248
Newsline Editor (Joan Scott)	444-7307

Bicycle Bits



Back to School

- * Be *extra cautious* for pedestrians and bicyclists on roadways
- * Be *aware* of activities and children on and around the road
- * *Slow Down* -children are unpredictable and make sudden movements
- * Be *ready* to stop! It could mean a child's life !



4700 copies of this public document were published at an estimated cost of 34¢ per copy for a total of \$1,595.62 which includes \$526.32 for printing and \$1069.35 for distribution. Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided upon request.

Montana Minute

Montana is third in the nation for the *least* people per square mile with six. Alaska is first with one and Wyoming is second with five!

Montana also ranks third in the nation for the *least* population per mile of public roads with thirteen, North Dakota is first with seven and is South Dakota is second with nine.

43% of Montana's land area meets the 19th Century Census Bureau definition of "Frontier".

Billings' population of approximately 100,000 makes it the largest city in Montana, as well as the largest city in a 500 mile radius or 785,000 square miles!

Montana Department of Transportation
Transportation Planning Division
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P.O. Box 201001
Helena, Montana 59620-1001
(406) 444-3423
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